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May 14, 1984

Hon. Romano L. Mazzoli
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Mazzoli:

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I write to you as spokesperson for former CIA spouses who were left out of the CIA Spouses' Retirement Equity Act of 1982 (PL97-269). Because the act only provided benefits for those divorced after the effective date, many deserving former spouses who were divorced before the 1982 act were excluded from its benefits. We are fully aware of and grateful to you for your leadership role in enacting PL 97-269. That landmark legislation acknowledged the service and sacrifice of CIA spouses and established their right to share in the pension benefits which they helped earn. We urge you now to complete the job. You will recall that when PL 97-269 was under consideration in the Congress the section by section analysis of the bill noted:

"Establishing the effective date in this way leaves certain spouses, who are divorced before the enactment of the amendments, without additional protection. While the Committee realizes that this group has certainly made an important contribution as a result of their marriages, it has decided not to pursue a statutory remedy in their favor at this time. This is because to do so would be retroactively to change the amount of payments already being received under CIARDS and possibly even affect the validity of existing divorce decrees. At some future date the Congress may wish, nevertheless, to consider providing additional benefits to this group in recognition of their important service."

Congressman Mazzoli, we think that future date has certainly arrived and we urge you to introduce legislation now to provide the benefits which this group of earlier divorced CIA spouses have earned.

As you are aware, legislation has been proposed to extend benefits to former Foreign Service spouses who were similarly excluded from pension benefits (HR 5197 and HR 5598). These bills offer possible models for CIA legislation. The upcoming CIA funding legislation might offer a suitable vehicle for extending benefits to the excluded former spouses.

This legislation is sorely needed and long overdue. Many of these older divorced CIA spouses are in dire financial straits, surviving on charity and family handouts. After years of unpaid government service abroad, these women were left with no employment records, no modern job skills, no Social Security. These women do not have Social Security rights from their marriages because CIA employees did not earn Social Security credits. In most cases these women have been unable to build up sufficient credits on their own. Without Social Security, they are ineligible for Medicare. In the few cases where alimony was awarded, it shrank with inflation, it ceases entirely with the employee's death. Many of these women face penury after long years of service to their country.

We estimate there are about ⁶⁵fifty women in the excluded group. They are older women (median age: 56), typically married 25 years, who spent 20 or more years in CIA service, most of that service abroad, often in unhealthy and/or hazardous areas. This group of women is no less entitled to pension rights than those divorced after November 15, 1982. Indeed, it was this group of older divorced spouses who inspired and worked for passage of PL 97-269.

In addition to pension rights, we urge also that these women be readmitted to the Federal employee health benefits program (HR 5197 and HR 5598 both include health benefits) from which they were excluded at the time of divorce. Because of age and health problems acquired abroad, private health insurance for these women is exorbitantly expensive and in some cases unavailable. Many of these women have no health coverage whatsoever. As noted above they are ineligible for Medicare. Federal health care benefits could be extended at no cost to the taxpayer; the women would pay the entire cost, both the employee and the government shares of the cost.

I have enclosed additional materials to support this appeal: a profile of the women concerned and a description of the CIA wife's service to the country.

My colleagues and I are prepared to meet with you and provide any additional information you may need.

Very truly yours,

Barbara Colby